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AUTHOR Tomic, Olga Miseska
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ABSTRACT

Contact between languages in the multilingual school context of Yugoslavia is examined. In that country, 12 languages are spoken and taught as a native language; ten function as predominant languages in larger or smaller communities, three are predominant within a republic, and one (Serbo-Croatian) is designated as the official language. It is noted that while second language instruction is available, it is the student who chooses which of the 11 non-native languages he will study. In most cases, student choice of second language depends heavily on the ethnolinguistic characteristics of the community. Native Serbo-Croatian speakers generally show little interest in learning another language. The character of language preparation in bilingual systems also varies greatly, depending on the linguistic, political, and intellectual demands of the immediate environment. The situation is even more complex for dialects, which the educational system hardly acknowledges. It is concluded that dialects should be respected just as native languages should in the development of the individual, assuming that they do not compromise communication. (MSE)

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LANGUAGE AS A TARGET AND INSTRUMENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IN A MULTILINGUAL SETTING

OLGA MISESKA TOMIC
University "Kiril i Metodij"
Skopje, Yugoslavia

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the intersection of language codes in the educational system of multilingual Yugoslavia. It is argued that the freedom to teach, learn and use one's own mother tongue has a positive effect on the development of the personality of an individual if it does not hamper the communication within the wider environment. It is also pointed out that an awareness of the structure of the dialect and its interrelationship with the standard contributes to the individual's integrity and independent thinking, since the individual identifies with the dialect rather than with the standard language.

The scope of the notion 'language' can be examined at four levels of abstraction. At the highest level, it is defined as a set of communication systems of which the speech of the humans is a subsystem. At the second highest level, only the speech of the humans is taken into consideration. At the level below it, 'language' refers to all the idioms of a language community, on the basis of which the community itself is defined. At the lowest level, it is restricted to the institutionalized, socially acknowledged collective idiom of a given language community, to the standard as an antipode of the dialect and sociolect. When we speak of the language in the educational process of a community, we are concerned with all the languages taught and all the languages through which teaching is carried out. Consequently, we start from the second highest level of abstraction and take into consideration the two levels lower than it.

The role of language in the educational process is very specific. It is at the same time the target of mother tongue and foreign language education and the instrument through which that education is carried out. This specificity obliges. Language is, however, so much part of our living that, not only the user of the products of the educational process, the society, but also the educators themselves are unaware of their obligations.

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The mother tongue is known, so the role of the mother tongue teacher is to analyse its structure, taking for granted a whole range of primitives, and to reinforce the norm. Drilling is often limited to writing compositions, whose value is assessed on the basis of the number of qualifying adjectives contained. Not much attention is paid to preparing the students for variable language use in different environments at variable levels of formality. Dialectal variations are either completely ignored or else only touched upon through one or two illustrative texts.

With foreign language teaching the situation is a lot better. The foreign language has to be learnt, so the curricula pay attention to acquisition of facts about the phonetics/phonology, morphology, syntax and lexis of the target language, as well as to mastering the skills of understanding, reading, speaking, and writing. Nevertheless, the foreign language is viewed as an invariant system and its acquisition is linear. The differences between the literary and the colloquial registers are, as a rule, only illustrated while the dialects and sociolects are hardly ever mentioned. As a consequence, in spite of the communicative approaches, the communicative competence of our students is limited.

Little or no attention is paid to the varieties of foreign language teaching. Of course, the differences between foreing and second language are gradually being acknowledged, but the curricula for the acquisition of the latter are far from adequate. What we call 'second language' is not, as a matter of fact, an unique category. The interrelationship of the languages which are targets and instruments in the educational process of multilingual Yugoslavia shall illustrate the complexity of this notion and the problems it brings about.

Of the twelve languages spoken and taught as a mother tongue in the country,[1] ten function as predominant languages in larger or smaller communities, three are predominant within a republic and one, Serbo-Croatian, the language whose native speakers by far outnumber the native speakers of each and all of the other languages,[2] is unofficially used as a means of communication between speakers whose native languages differ.[3] In this complicated language setting, the distinction first/second or native/foreign language was not satisfactory; it was necessary to make more refined characterisations. So, one introduced the notion 'language of the environment'. Candidates for the status of the 'language of the environment' are all the languages spoken as mother tongues in larger of smaller communities in Yugoslavia. For any given individual, there are eleven

such languages, the twelfth language spoken as a mother tongue in the country being his/her own mother tongue.

The teaching of the languages of the environment is integrated in the educational system (or rather systems) of Yugoslavia, though not on a compulsory basis: it is up to the pupil and/or the parent to decide whether to enrol and which languages(s) to select. In theory, any pupil can select any and all eleven languages of his environment; in practice, however, the ethno-linguistic structure of the immediate environment and the prospects for the use of the language impose high restrictions on his/her selection. In regions inhabited by members of both the nations and the nationalities[4] of Yugoslavia, as well as in the republics in which the less widely spoken languages of the nations, Macedonian and Slovenian, predominate, at least one language of the environment is being selected as a target language by every primary school pupil. Typically, the native speakers of the languages of the nationalities study the language predominating in the republic in which they live, the native speakers of the languages of the nations who inhabit regions where the languages of the nationalities are more or less widely spoken study the language of the nationality with which they have intensive contact, while those native speakers of Macedonian and Slovenian who live outside the regions where there are substantial numbers of native speakers of the languages of the nationalities, study Serbo-Croatian. The speakers of Serbo-Croatian who inhabit and are educated in regions where contacts with the languages of the nationalities are not prominent or do not exist at all show little interest in studying the languages of the environment: all Belgrade primary schools offer Macedonian and Slovenian, but the demand for them is low. On the other hand, in the schools in Macedonia, where the basic medium, i.e. the instrument of instruction is Albanian or Turkish, not one but two languages of the environment, Macedonian and Serbo-Croatian, are studied, but the teaching of Serbo-Croatian is a residual from the postwar period, when that language was part of the primary school curricula throughout the country, and is, consequently, not indicative of pupil or parent preferences.

It was pointed out above that the motivation for selecting a language of the environment as a target language depends on the ethno-linguistic structure of the immediate environment and the prospects for the use of the language. This general dependency can be further specified if we examine enrolments in regions where there are substantial numbers of native speakers of the languages of the nationalities.

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According to the data given by Mikes (1984:123-124), in the Autonomous Region of Vouvodina, during the academic year 1979/80, 80 per cent of the primary school pupils of Hungarian nationality attended schools where instruction was given in their mother tongue; for the pupils of Slovak, Romanian and Ruthenian nationality the respective percentages were 65, 68 and 45. In the same period the secondary schools of the region offered instruction in the mother tongue to 70 per cent of the pupils of Hungarian nationality, to 32 per cent of the pupils of Slovak nationality, 38 per cent of the pupils of Romanian nationality, and 24 per cent of the pupils of Ruthenian nationality. An analysis of these data in the light of the shares of the given nationalities in the overall population of the region (which, according to the 1981 census, are: Hungarian 19, Slovak and Romanian 3 each, and Ruthenian less than 1 per cent), leads to the conclusion that the coverage of the population of the nationalities by instruction in the mother tongue is high, but diminishing with the diminishing share of the given nationality in the overall population of the region, as well as with transfer from primary to secondary school. This conclusion is not surprising: the educated members of the community are bound to move out of it and are, consequently, urged to prepare for adequate communication with individuals and groups that do not speak their mother tongue. This urge, of course, increases with the decrease of the share of the members of a given nationality in the overall population of the country.

Evidence from Slovenian and Macedonian lends support to these conclusions. In the Slovenian region of Prekmurje, in two communities in which the indigenous population consists of Slovenes and Hungarians, all classes in nursery and primary school are conducted alternatively in Slovenian and Hungarian. The educators aim at a specific type of bilingualism, referred to as functional bilingualism (cf. Lûk 1984; Mikes, Lûk, Junger 1984), which enables the individual to use each of the two languages relative to the functions which they have. In practice, the primary school leavers whose mother tongue is Slovenian are able to use Hungarian only in everyday conversation, while the ones whose mother tongue is Hungarian get initial preparation for use of Slovenian in more official situations, as well. In the secondary school and at the University, instruction is in Slovenian.[5] Thus, the bilingual education has a double integrative role: (a) it prepares native speakers of both Slovenian and Hungarian for coordinative life in their own communites and (b) it equips native speakers of

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Hungarian with the necessary language prerequisite for their further education and for life outside Prekmurje.

In the Macedonian communities in which there are substantial numbers of inhabitants whose native language is Albanian or Turkish, there are both primary and secondary schools with Albanian or Turkish as a medium of instruction. Nevertheless, many native speakers of Albanian and Turkish attend secondary schools where all teaching is in Macedonian or else ones in which some subjects are taught in the language of the nationality and some in Macedonian.[6] In this way, they are well prepared for further education, which is in Macedonian, and for integration in the intellectual life of the republic.

In the autonomous region of Kosovo, where instruction is parallel in Albanian, Turkish, and Serbo-Croatian (for different segments of the population), and in all spheres of life the three languages are used (with Albanian prevailing, because the native speakers of that language are in majority), the native speakers of Albanian are educated in Albanian and the native speakers of Turkish in Turkish, the former all the way through. The freedom to learn and use the language of their own choice undoubtedly contributes to their independent thinking; it, however, has an adverse effect on their overall intellectual development. Since they can use adequately their mother tongues in all walks of life in the region, the native speakers of the languages of the nationalities are not urged to learn the language of their environment well (or even at all). As a consequence, (a) the co-living within the region is inadequate, and (b) the native speakers of the languages of the nationalities are insufficiently prepared for integration in the life of the country as a whole. The latter, not only because their knowledge of any of the other Yugoslav languages is insufficient, but also because, the educational level of the Yugoslavs whose mother tongue is Albanian being (out of historical reasons) perspicuously lower than elsewhere, there is a severe lack of qualified personnel who could teach in that language and, consequently, the general knowledge acquired by the pupils of the schools where Albanian is the instrument of instruction is in disparity with the general knowledge acquired elsewhere in the country. (Endeavouring to remedy the situation, one has been made it even worse; by the lowering of the standards one has produced quantities of formally qualified personnel and has allowed for a scale of quality in the country as a whole.[7])

I could finish by stating that the freedom to teach, learn and use one's own mother tongue has a positive effect on the development of the personality of an individual only if it does not impose limitations upon the communication within his/her wider environment. But, before finishing I would like to throw light upon the fact that, like the notion 'second language', the notion 'mother tongue' does not refer to a unique category, but rather to a cross-section over a scale of dialects and sociolects. This cross-section is especially transparent in languages with recent standardization, such as Macedonian.

Typically, a speaker of Macedonian develops in a specific local dialect atmosphere. If he/she lives in one of the provincial towns, he/she grows up with a specific local dialect, distinct from the one in the next town even when the latter is no more than ten to fifteen kilometers off, and with a version of the Macedonian standard, which includes all the elements that the dialect shares with the standard language, as well as a varying number of nonstandardized elements characteristic for the language of the area, but definitely excludes all optional standardized features which have their roots in another area. An average speaker of Macedonian who was born and lives in the capital of Macedonia, would follow the same pattern; if he/she is well educated and involved in activities that require official communication, however, he/she would grow up with: (a) a local dialect, (b) a broader regional code, in which the local dialect and the standard language are interwoven,[8] and (c) a version of the standard language which excludes the optional standardized features rooted in an 'alien' dialect. The most complicated is the language situation of the speakers that have moved into the capital, and these are a major factor, the city having more than tripled the number of its inhabitants within the forty post-war years, by and large through immigration from other parts of the republic. Adult immigrants usually keep the two codes with which they have grown up, though brushing up their versions of the standard code by getting rid of nonstandardized elements. Their children, however, grow up with three codes: (a) the dialect of the parents, (b) a broader regional code in which the local Skopje dialect and the standard interweave, but which is to some extent influenced by the dialect of their parents, as well, and (c) a version of the standard code, in which the standard codes of the Macedonian speakers in one's own environment intersect.

The different codes are present in the educational institutions, though the educational systems hardly ever acknowledge them. But they should! The individual identifies with the dialect rather than with the standard

language, and an awareness of its structure and its interrelationship with the standard would contribute to his/her integrity, to his/her independent thinking. What is more, the language of the environment is not a standard language but a dialect, and the speaker of a language of the nationality would relate to it more readily than to the standard. We might conclude that the freedom to teach, learn and use one's own mother tongue has a positive effect on the development of the personality of the individual if it does not destroy communicative equality and if it takes into account the fact that what we call 'mother tongue' is a complex category, ranging over a scale of codes.

NOTES

[1]In diminishing number of native speakers: Serbo-Croatian, Slovenian, Macedonian, Albanian, Hungarian, Turkish, Slovak, Bulgarian, Romanian, Italian, Ruthenian, and Czech.

[2]According to the 1981 census, 16,342,885 out of the total number of 22,424,882 inhabitants of Yugoslavia speak Serbo-Croatian as their mother tongue.

[3]None of the languages of Yugoslavia is the official language for the country as a whole.

[4]The term 'nationality' replaced the term 'national minority', which is considered biased.

[5]Hungarian is taught as a target language only. Classes are set up for native speakers of Slovenian and Hungarian separately, their proficiency being different.

[6]Which subject is taught in which language depends on teacher availability.

[7]There is no state-wide examination at any level.

[8]This regional code moves in the direction of becoming regional register.

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